Module: Visual Supports

Overview of Visual Supports


Visual supports are any tool presented visually that supports an individual as he or she moves through the day. Visual supports might include, but are not limited to, pictures, written words, objects within the environment, arrangement of the environment or visual boundaries, schedules, maps, labels, organization systems, timelines, and scripts. They are used across settings to support individuals with ASD (National Research Council, 2001).

Evidence

Visual supports meet the evidence-based practice criteria within the early childhood, elementary, and middle school age groups.

With what ages are visual supports effective?

Visual supports can be implemented with individuals across the age range, beginning in preschool and extending through middle school age. Effective visual supports in early childhood settings include visual schedules to increase task engagement, visual scripts to encourage social interaction, and picture cues to support play skill development (Krantz & McClannahan, 1998; Massey & Wheeler, 2000; Morrison, Sainato, BenChaaban, & Endo, 2002). In elementary and middle school, visual supports such as schedules and picture cues have proven effective in reducing transition time, increasing on-task behavior, and in completing self-help in the home (Bryan & Gast, 2000; Dettmer, Simpson, Myles, & Ganz, 2000; MacDuff, Krantz, & McClannahan, 1993).

What skills or intervention goals can be addressed by visual supports?

Visual supports target a number of adaptive behavior skills, including task engagement, independent performance, transitions across activities, and increasing response chain length. Visual supports have also proven effective in increasing skills across curriculum areas, including the demonstration of play skills, social interaction skills, and social initiation. In addition, visual supports have been beneficial in reducing self-injurious behavior.

In what settings can visual supports be effectively used?

Visual supports have been used effectively in classroom settings and home settings. Visual supports are intended to be used as one component of comprehensive programming for individuals with ASD.
Module: Visual Supports

Evidence Base

The studies cited in this section provide the basis upon which this practice was determined to meet the NPDC on ASD’s criteria as an evidence-based practice. This list is not exhaustive and other quality studies may exist but were not found in our search.

Preschool


Elementary and Middle School Age


Module: Visual Supports


Selected Additional References


